Artworks Of Guilty Gear X 2000-2004

Interview With Daisuke Ishiwatari, English Translation

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The Hands That Shaped *Guilty Gear X*

As the creator of the *Guilty Gear X* series, Daisuke Ishiwatari is not only a character designer but also a general director and is active in all aspects of the series. We visited Mr. Ishiwatari, who is extremely busy, to discover the source of the world overflowing with imagination and the richly expressive illustrations created by him.

CHAPTER 1

Not as a designer, but as a game developer.

(1)---The illustrations printed in this artbook are all things created by you, right? But besides design, I've heard that you supervised the development of the *Guilty Gear X* series as the general director. What do you think of as your main work? Designer or director?

Ishiwatari: My position on the staff is officially "General Director" but even I don't clearly understand the definition of that (laughs). It's just that more than a "designer" or "illustrator," I think the role that fits me best is "someone who wants to make games". Other than drawing illustrations, I'm trying my hand at adjusting the balance of the game, designing the characters, matching the voices, and even composing the music. In brief, you could say I want to take part in every aspect of the development of my works. I'm the link needed to develop both the illustrations and the game. You could think of *Guilty Gear* [1998: Arc System Works], which was released on the PlayStation, as the equivalent of the first version of *Guilty Gear X*, but actually this was an idea I had been thinking about since my occupational school days. At that time, my passion for fighting games skyrocketed, so I started to think "What if I made fighting games?" And that's how I came to work in all these various positions.

(2)---Now this time, you showed me a great number of illustrations, but how do you go about drawing these? Do you have any favorite art materials or something like that?

Ishiwatari: As far as art materials go, all I use is a pencil and A4 size copy paper. I'm not inclined to be picky about drawing on drawing paper or drafting paper. There are times I draw with a regular pencil, and there are also times I draw with a mechanical pencil that is very similar to a regular pencil. The only thing is, the darkness of the lead is always F. Moreover, I've decided to never use lead below 0.5 thickness. The eraser too, is a commonplace thing you can buy for 50 or 100 yen or so, exactly like this MONO [brand eraser]. For a period of time I thought I would try using the eraser on the mechanical pencil, but I erase a lot, so it wasn't useful. And plus I don't really know how to use a kneaded rubber eraser... For coloring I am using Copic markers. For all the pictures where I think, "let's try drawing this without stocking up on markers," I start to feel like I don't have enough colors to complete the picture, so right before drawing I go to places like Toukyuu Hands and buy a bunch.

(3)---Of all your Copic markers, what's the color being used the most often?

Ishiwatari: Black. Well, you say "black" as one word, but really there are 4 or 5 different kinds as far as Copic markers go. At any rate, black goes the fastest. Of black's variations (neutrals), the colors close to white and the greys are especially useful.

(4)---Was it a simple matter for you to get used to drawing with pencils, copy paper, and Copic markers?

Ishiwatari: The medium that I could draw with fastest, you're saying. Truthfully, I like to draw with colors, but using colors still ends up taking a lot of time, so I have to draw in pencil. Especially if I'm drawing 10 or 20 characters, it's difficult to spare time to do that page by page. What I mean is that together, pencil and copy paper are fastest for jotting my ideas down when they come. Really, CG is probably faster, but I've decided not to use CG[1] to draw...

(5)---What are your reasons for not drawing in CG?

Ishiwatari: There are lots of reasons, but the number one reason is that I want those works to be the only ones in the world. Also, I want to draw in a situation where failures aren't effective. For example, in response to a situation where I end up painting the wrong color by mistake and it's beyond repair, the thought of having the spirit to start over and fix it, of adding a novel color from there and trying somehow to make it better, and there still being something left to play with, is personally more fun for me. I put aside whether it is good or bad, and have the feeling that the pictures flow easily out of the mental part of myself, and if I lose the original I also want to be able to say "It's gone" with regret (laughs).

(6)---You're more particular about originality than art materials, aren't you?

Ishiwatari: Actually, I've drawn with CG before once in the past, but just as I thought it didn't catch on. Essentially, I think that outside of the category of work, I should draw in situations where I'm doing few trial and errors with CG, and I think it's better to only use filters and new techniques like that to efficiently finish up. As a game developer, if you're thinking you want to leave even a little of your work behind in this world, that's even more so the case. It's just that even understanding that my own way of doing things has lots of futile parts, I knowingly stick to an analog way of doing things no matter what.

(7)---Please let us ask about the process of the Ishiwatari-[art] style (which you say is analog) of drawing.

Ishiwatari: It's nothing but drawing a rough on a piece of copy paper with pencil and mechanical pencil and erasing, over and over again. More than the roughs being used for the artbook that I showed you, there are times when the rough is more like a pitch-black dirty worm wriggling across the page. I'm deciding that will be my rough draft and groping around for the silhouette. There is a degree of tracing of that drawing, but the frequency of tracing is something that solidifies the image from the beginning and is completed in 1 to 2 sheets, and there are

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[1] CG = Computer Graphics. Art drawn on a computer using a program like Photoshop, Paint, etc.

times, depending on the case, that it takes more than 4 times. In addition, if there aren't enough elements, I also add on to the line drawing that I traced with an ink pen. It's truly a waste of paper (laughs). And I use Copic markers to color, but on top of that I also occasionally include highlighter and color pencil.

(8)---What kind of style do you draw with?

Ishiwatari: Usually I work on the desk at my workplace. In rare cases, I'll also draw in a slovenly way at home when it's a small bit of work that's like a side job. I prepare some black tea and lay out a pencil board on the bed.

(9)---Is the way you draw all self-taught?

Ishiwatari: My way of drawing is from looking at other illustrators that did it right; it might be an extremely rude way of doing things. From the start, I'm not drawing in a technical way, so I'm not changing my format. A long time ago, I thought I would mimic well-known artists' way of drawing, but it was a bother, so in the end I settled on my own style. Also, I don't even think about this and that when it comes to drawing tools, I just go with the color I'm thinking of, or without thinking anything at all, and do it in real time, enjoying this degree of analog-ness. If I decide on Copic markers, I end up using the suitable one, even with the thought of how other artists do it, like "What number [marker] do I use here" and so on, and "Amazing, if I don't remember all the numbers I can't draw the picture." Well, there are times when this is to blame for when I end up painting something with a color so strong it's like it can't be recovered...of course, when I have to draw commercially, I'll draw it and pass it off as-is, but when I'm drawing for myself I end up drawing with the flow. I am the kind of person where the most important thing is to feel good about the result.

(10)---How many hours does it take for you to do a single color illustration?

Ishiwatari: It's different depending on the picture. If the deadline is decided and I'm ordered to "Draw this many characters," I draw according to that schedule. In contrast, if there aren't any restrictions at all, first it'll take me time to decide what I want to draw, then on top of that it'll take me time to get the line drawing out on paper, and I'll get stressed out about how to color it (laughs). I personally prefer to be able to draw freely, but in the case of having a deadline, getting a theme and drawing it is faster, and on top of that it's easier to keep your motivation too.

(11)---In some of your works, you've even drawn the background. What part of drawing a picture do you put the most effort into?

Ishiwatari: I'm not all that conscious of it, but I'm going for a layout that makes the parts I want to show stand out. In the case of this picture, since it has a background, I bring out the character's edges and make how much contrast and how much presence I can give it as my basis for drawing, and think only about if I can actualize it as a picture. Basically I'm bad at backgrounds, but if you compare a picture with a background to a picture without a background,

the feeling of completeness is greater, and drawing backgrounds will increase my expressive ability, so I try to do so as much as possible.

(12)---Do you grasp a pen and solidify the part of that image that you want to show?

Ishiwatari: It's spur of the moment. First you start with a scribble of what you want to draw. At that stage you're drawing something that has absolutely nothing to do with what you should be drawing, then "Oh, this would be good" and an idea is born that you put into your rough draft. There are cases when I'll get the poses of the characters out of my pen as I go, and there are cases when I'll adapt the characters after I've decided the overall composition. The way I draw is different every time, but there are times when it's like "this kind of thing, this kind of thing" I'll add on to my drawing, and then it becomes "oh, this will be interesting". Well, there are many times where if I try to draw the opposite way it's not interesting...My analog piling up of work is to blame for all these failures, so if I think about what I'm leaving in my collection of works I feel a little bit of regret.

(13)---Do you use a collection of pose references or anything like that when you are drawing your characters?

Ishiwatari: When I first started working, I tried to use those kinds of books and wooden artists' dolls. But collections of pose references just can't capture the meaning of the movement. When I thought "How do I do the structure of the area below the armpit?" I looked at the pose reference, and even when I felt like "Oh, this is how you do it" it still didn't pass for the shape of the armpit when one makes that pose. Because the pictures I want to draw are strictly different from reality, those things can't really become references, you see. I get insecure without a wooden artists' doll, but after all, it can't really take on the pose that I want to draw. ...So, the thing that was the most helpful when it came to studying poses was probably Capcom's mook[2], *Character Illustrations Book*. At that time, Capcom was just beginning to try out the blocky muscles style of drawing. When I saw that I was extremely shocked, and "This is how you do muscles!" –just like that I was finally able to understand the movement of muscles. For me, it was the best textbook ever.

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[2] A mook is a publication which is physically similar to a magazine but is intended to remain on bookstore shelves for longer periods than traditional magazines, and is a popular format in Japan. The term is a portmanteau of "magazine" and "book." via Wikipedia.

(14)---When the image in your illustration has hardened, how do you go about changing the mood of it?

Ishiwatari: You mean the type of situation where I'm thinking "just a bit more" all the way up to the deadline, right? When that happens, I just go out and play. In that space of time I come to vaguely adjust my schedule by myself, while living like a human being. Just for the record, the character Venom was born when I was out playing billiards and I thought, "It would be interesting if there were a guy who wielded a cue [as a weapon]." And, when it comes to the point where I have to be glued to my desk drawing, I always listen to music while I draw. I listen to a lot of western music: rock and metal, etc. but basically I'll listen to anything. Namco and Falcom's old music is good too. Stuff from back in the day when FM music like *Dragon Spirit* and *System 2* was out.

(15)---If you analyzed it, what would you say are the charming and selling points of your illustrations?

Ishiwatari: Charming and selling points… there isn't anything like that! If I'm forced to say something, I would say it's probably the energy and vigor [in my illustrations]. Because I'm drawing with the thought of saying something clearly. In my student days I contributed to a manga, and at that time I tried to include a pattern as my own selling point, but now my degree of freedom in drawing has just about disappeared, so I'm trying my best to be laid-back about pattern and style. Regarding the character Sol, I end up taking advantage of how well-known he is and change his pattern every time. If I'm changing how he speaks, I'll draw him with just the feeling of "This time I'll have a Brad Pitt style Sol" or "This time it'll be Tom Cruise," etc. So, I'm not really like a mangaka.

CHAPTER 2
Guilty Gear X and Mr. Ishiwatari's inspirations…

(16)---In your profile it's written that you were born in South Africa, but how long did you live there [in a foreign country]?

Ishiwatari: I was born in South Africa because of my parents' work, and we returned to Japan soon after, but I ended up living over there again from 4th grade of elementary school till the second half of 7th grade.

(17)---Have you been drawing illustrations ever since your boyhood in South Africa?

Ishiwatari: The stuff I was drawing back then was manga. I read Weekly Shounen Jump for the first time over there, and met *Kin Niku Man* [Muscle Man]. I was enthusiastic and candidly thought "I also want to draw this kind of manga, I want to try drawing an original superhero." And then I got lost in an ecstatic daze reading *Ringu ni Kakero* [Hold Tight to the Ring]. First it was Yude Tamago-sensei, then Kurumada Masami-sensei, and subsequently Araki Hirohiko-sensei of *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* that I progressively read, and started to get a sense of the existence of authors and their products.

(18)---I don't know much about the country of South Africa, but could it be that you were starved for entertainment there?

Ishiwatari: Yeah. There were only 3 channels on TV. In addition, there was only one channel with English broadcasting; the rest were broadcast in African languages. The anime they had on that channel was known to be nothing great, and there wasn't much in the way of entertainment. It was like generationally, I wasn't at the age to be listening to music, so I read manga that I borrowed from my friends, who sent them to me from Japan.

(19)---So manga made up most of your insufficient entertainment. So is that why you thought you would draw it too?

Ishiwatari: I don't think I thought that deeply about it. It was just that I drew manga in the school's free notebook, and enjoyed getting my friends to read it for their reaction. It was like that during my occupational school days too, but there were definitely guys around me who were better than me at drawing. And, I did relay manga with those guys and I felt that I wanted to surpass those guys in sparking interest.

(20)---What kind of manga were you drawing in those days?

Ishiwatari: It was a boxing manga. I was greatly influenced by Kurumada sensei and was drawing a manga like *Ringu ni Kakero* [Hold Tight to the Ring]. That's why at that time, the character I was drawing had thick eyebrows and sideburns and all of his T-shirts had torn sleeves (laughs).

(21)---And you returned to Japan in your second year of middle school. Did your hobbies, etc. change when your surroundings and environment changed and your amusements increased?

Ishiwatari: My hobbies didn't change, but over there [in South Africa] my play mainly consisted of tennis and soccer, whereas in Japan I wasn't able to play like that. There was a part when I couldn't cheerfully converse, and come to think of it, just about the only thing I've come to be able to do since that time is draw manga. So, I was rushing headlong onto the highway to becoming an otaku. In my quote un-quote "ring of few friends" there just happened to be some people who drew manga, but when I returned to Japan, I started my existence as a geek in a

manga research society, and drawing manga was good-for-nothing delinquency that I got myself entangled in (laughs).

(22)---When did you first encounter video games?

Ishiwatari: Before my second time in South Africa, I would occasionally pass through an arcade. I didn't have money but I had this friend, Kenkko, and he got a lot of pocket money. Ever since the days of *Invader* we somehow kept in touch. There was even a game center in South Africa, but I mostly didn't go there to play. It was just that I thought it was good enough to have a friend who had a Famicom (Nintendo).

(23)---You said you joined a manga research society when you got back to Japan, and that you also made submissions during your school years, but what kind of catalyst propelled you to suddenly switch to feeling like you wanted to try to become a game developer?

Ishiwatari: That would be my encounter with *Street Fighter II* [1991: Capcom]. I was shocked that there was something so interesting, and I ended up staying a long time at the arcade. Up till that I thought I wanted to make shooting games, and even went so far as to write down my ideas, but this encounter with *Street Fighter II* was a defining moment.

(24)---Come to think of it, while both *Street Fighter II* and *Guilty Gear X* are in the 2D fighting game genre, isn't it thought of as an odd interpretation of the world?

Ishiwatari: There was this manga called *BASTARD!!* that was serialized in Weekly Shounen Jump, and at that time a product like that, where light fantasy was made into a manga, was a rare and sensational item. Only that writer had this light fantasy interpretation of the world, and it was a product where magic, not swords, was set as the main feature. For the debut of a product where the protagonist was a magic-wielder, there was a vivid awareness of the thing known as magic. I haven't ever mimicked the illustrations, but to put it simply, I think I have received an extremely large influence.

(25)---Other than *BASTARD!!*, the characters' names are those of foreign musicians-- elements that seem to have been influential to you are reflected in the game. For example, it appears that "ROCK YOU" is written on Sol's headgear, etc.

Ishiwatari: There was an athletic meet during 4th and 5th grade of Elementary School, and for the cheer we used something by QUEEN. "There's amazing music out there!!" — I was moved and started listening to western music. After that I felt like I wanted to listen to various artists, and the first album I picked up was Whitesnake's *Serpents Albus*. It was music of a different nature from QUEEN, but it was good hard rock, so it was a personal favorite. And next I bought some Iron Maiden music. I was extremely surprised again. The A style B style melodies that I knew were destroyed, and I learned about the existence of [the metal genre] in this world. From there, all at once I was into western music.

(26)---Even so, more than 20 characters were designed by just you. Where do you find a source of ideas for each character's features?

Ishiwatari: In the early stages of development of *Guilty Gear X* I was making it up with just the image in mind, but once we reached the final stages of development I had changed to a creation process that obeyed the logic of fighting games. The logic is like, "This character has this way of fighting, and has usability like this." Basically, after you've thought about the characters for a game, you'll be creating with additions afterwards, like this (for example)--"there's a need for a short character, so let's go with a girl."

(27)---The character Bridget, introduced in *Guilty Gear XX*, looks like a girl but is actually a boy, right? What was your intention in deciding on creating this kind of character?

Ishiwatari: The creation of Bridget as a boy happened at the very last second; during development I was drawing him as purely a girl. It's just that when there is a need to give a worldly backbone (to the game), in order for me to try to not forget each character, and in order to revive the character, I give them my very heart. As a result, the creation of Bridget as actually a boy instead of a girl was because I thought he could become my alter ego. Well, if there was a need for the reverse—a girl that looks like a boy—that would be okay too, but it doesn't look pretty game-wise. It's also somewhat calculated (laughs).

(28)---Recently, are there any artists that you pay attention to or have been influenced by?

Ishiwatari: This may be misleading, but actually I don't have any anymore. It's just been me up to this point; as for noticing or being influenced, it means being extremely interested in the sense of "What should I do in order to draw like these guys." That has been fading, and it's become just simply being purely moved, like, "This person is amazing! So they draw like this, huh?"

(29)---Does that mean that you're in the same position as those aforementioned artists...?

Ishiwatari: I absolutely don't think that (it's rude). The reason is that, more than devising the kind of technical progress where I'm making bolder rough sketches or choosing the color, from the stance of a game developer, I've found what I'm supposed to do. If I became someone who specialized in pictures, I might turn my gaze to technical aspects again, but it's like now my point of view has changed.

(30)---I see. Even so there are lots of fans who want to draw like you do. Lastly, do you have a message for these fans who are making you their goal?

Ishiwatari: To be able to give advice on technical aspects is very, very.... It's embarrassing, but if I'm forced to say it, I think it's "draw so you'll want to draw." But simply put, wanting to draw like me is a little different from originality, isn't it? Not "this picture is an Ishiwatari" but "isn't this way of drawing Ishiwatari's?" Doesn't it make one feel ashamed to hear "isn't this picture

already Ishiwatari" despite having challenged yourself to draw a new picture? I think I want to draw the kind of picture that can convey the thought "whatever I draw, this is me"—the anything-goes stance I've had from the very beginning.

Daisuke Ishiwatari
August 14, 1973
Born in Johannesburg, South Africa
Arc System Works, Inc.
General director of the "Guilty Gear" series,
Character & Game Design, Music Composition, Voice Actor
Illustrator with many hobbies.
Self-described as a "punchy painter."